



# Christina Martos Hilton

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After taking a break from her career as a soprano to raise her young daughter, the Intelligence Analysis and Technology Division's Christina Martos Hilton is preparing for a "Brush up your Shakespeare" song recital that will be performed on February 28, 2015, at the Unitarian Church of Los Alamos and on March 7 at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel in Santa Fe. The event will feature familiar Shakespearean texts in works by Giuseppe Verdi, Dominick Argento, Gerald Finzi, Erich Korngold and Cole Porter.

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Christina Martos Hilton's Highlights Demo 2014

Martos Hilton, known in musical circles as Christina Martos, studied opera with world-renowned opera singer Placido Domingo from 2004 to 2006 as part of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program at the Washington National Opera, has performed on famous stages such as Carnegie Hall and has a master's degree from the Yale School of Music.

Here in New Mexico, Martos Hilton has sung for the Santa Fe Community Orchestra, Bandelier National Monument's "Opera on the Rocks" series and the Laboratory's 9/11 memorial ceremony.

With her now seven-year-old daughter, Marina, in school, Martos Hilton is easing into a spare-time musical life through her love of music and dedication to sharing the experience. "Even in the midst of highly dramatic moments on stage I'm aware of the audience's reactions," Martos Hilton says, "and hear the big, heavy sigh in the back of the house. The collective participation in each performance on and off stage is touching and rewarding for me. Everyone in the room might feel a collective sense of humor, for example, or respond to aspects of the songs that are particularly meaningful at the time."

Martos Hilton's interest in sharing music began with her family. "On my mother's side," Martos Hilton says, "my family is passionate about the sounds of Caribbean music and dance, and family gatherings were always full of songs and laughter. My grandmother on my father's side has a wonderful and soothing alto voice and always sings old Spanish songs when she's working in the kitchen, with my dad often accompanying her by guitar."

## **Getting ready to be on stage**

As much as Martos Hilton enjoys opera, she treasures the particular intimacy of recitals. "I am really looking forward to the Shakespeare events and the other local concerts leading up to them," Martos Hilton explains, "because people in this area have been so supportive. They even have offered to make dresses for me or to watch Marina while I perform in the evening."

Preparing for musical events takes a lot of steps, steps that Martos Hilton used to have whole weeks and months to accomplish but now squeezes into brief moments between her full-time work at the Lab and her cherished time with Marina.

Yet in addition to her meetings and rehearsals with fellow performers, Martos Hilton still tries to follow the same private performance preparations that have helped her in the past.

If the composition is in a foreign language, Martos Hilton begins by translating the words into English to familiarize herself with the characters, story line and intended meaning through the slow, careful process of translation.

This first step is greatly helped by Martos Hilton's existing familiarity with a string of languages, including being bilingual in English and Spanish. By the time she graduated from Yale, Martos Hilton already had performed in Russian, Latin, Czech and Hebrew, and she studied Italian for nearly two hours every morning, with quite a bit of French and German sprinkled in as well.

Rather than learning foreign-language songs only by sound, Martos Hilton wants to understand the language itself. "The language in which a piece was written—or is performed—contributes its own beauty and colors the music's messages," she notes with a smile. "If you only learn the material phonetically, you lose at least 80 percent of

the meaning and can't pick up cues that the composer may have been trying to give to you."

After memorizing the piece section by section, Martos Hilton next conducts historical research related to the music. "Whenever I prepare for a performance," Martos Hilton says, "I'm curious about how and why each piece was composed, how it fits into the composer's life and historical period, how it was originally performed and how the composition's interpretations, performances and perceptions have changed over time. I'm a musician first and foremost, but history and language also have a tight hold on me."

Finally, Martos Hilton develops her artistic nuances for the performance by working with a vocal coach, voice teacher or the performance's director—and practicing in front of Marina.

"I try to bring all of these preparations and information gatherings into each live performance," Martos Hilton says, "because they inform what I bring to the shared experience with the audience and what they take away."

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Martos Hilton works for the Intelligence Analysis and Technology Division's Threat Reduction Science and Engineering group.

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